

ECUMENICAL PRESS SERVICE

Annual Subscription: \$3.00

17, ROUTE DE MALAGNOU, GENEVA

Printed in the U. S. A.

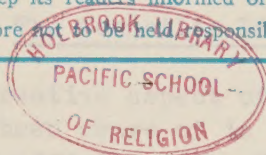
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under the auspices of

the WORLD COUNCIL of CHURCHES (in process of formation)
the INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY COUNCIL
the WORLD ALLIANCE for INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP THROUGH THE CHURCHES
the WORLD ALLIANCE of YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS
the WORLD'S YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
the WORLD'S STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION
the WORLD COUNCIL OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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No. 37/38

Fifteenth Year

September 7, 1948

First Assembly of the World Council of Churches

Drafting Reports

A famous journalist visiting the World Council Assembly threw up his hands in horror when he was told that the Council proposed to issue a two thousand word message to the world. "Does it take all that to say that 'God is love'?" he asked.

It does, and a lot more too. The brief, shorthand announcements of the Christian faith are so massively concentrated that modern man must have them spaced out, and in some cases almost predigested for him. The great words of the faith were meant to be summaries. They must be communicated in every age along the lines of understood communication and with the accent which living cultures use.

The World Council of Churches is now engaged on the ways and means of communication by, first of all, re-affirming the faith to itself, and then launching that reality into the context of present life. This task will not be finished by a two thousand word message, however inspired, from Amsterdam. Every delegate must leave the city with a sense of responsibility for the advocacy of the message whether he agrees with every word of it or no.

The findings of sections and committees will be the quarrying ground out of which the committee charged with framing the message will find its material. Not all of it is of equal value, as "Assembly News" representatives have noted in their private observations of the delegates at work. Somehow or other, facilities for closer debate must be found in future World Council meetings. Mere "points of view" and "convictions" have been too numerous. But the disciplines of the ecumenical encounter has started. It may now be continued in everyone of the forty-two countries represented.

The Amsterdam Assembly provides a demonstration ground for the Christian mind. To construct an agreed message to the world may be an ideal aim for such a Christian assembly, but unanimity must never be achieved through the sacrifice of tolerance and the ill-recognition of divergent views.

Now is the time for Amsterdam to show the world that, though within the Christian fellowship there are deep differences, none of them are deep enough to rend the fellowship and frustrate the working unity of the Christian Church.

The Council's Life

Another creative aspect of the Assembly which only a few delegates have been aware of is the grooming of the Council for its first period of official life. The Council must have freedom, but it must also be a ready servant to its members. This Assembly will shape new machinery and re-tool some of the ecumenical workshops. Upon delegates lies the honour of voting in Amsterdam and backing their vote with active support at home.

New officers have been elected in plenary session. Dr. John R. Mott is to be the first honorary president of the Council. New comers as presidents are Bishop Bromley Oxnam, New York, and Dr. T. C. Chao, China. The other presidents remain, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Archbishop Eidem, Archbishop Germanos, and Dr. Marc Boegner. These new officers represent in a fresh way the whole range of the world in the Council's leaders. The Central Committee consisting of ninety members replaces the old Provisional Committee. With the preparation of its new budget the Council is equipped to face the next period of its work.

Reconstruction

For many thousands in Europe and Asia the Reconstruction Department of the World Council has been the most potent example of the ecumenical idea. The Department, entrusted with large resources from the sending countries, has brought relief, life and hope to churches battling with war's aftermath, to the needy, the homeless, the hungry and the desolate. When the tale of its undertakings is fully told, this post-war service will add just renown to the infant ecumenical movement.

In a great Concertgebouw Meeting on Sunday, August 29, Dr. Hutchinson Cockburn, Director of the department, led a team of speakers: Baron Van Tuyll (Netherlands), George Wu (China), Eugen Gerstenmaier (Germany), Eynard Pantakimon (Greece), I. Krenek (Czechoslovakia) and Elfan Rees (W.C.C. Refugee Office), who provided the Assembly with brief pictures of a range of work which is astonishing in variety and scope. Right across Europe the life line of the Christian Church has helped to maintain the soul and spirit of the continent. Beds, bicycles, cloths, grain, paper, raw materials of every description, food and church equipment have been the authentic evidence of Christian concern.

Here is the July 1948 shipment to Austria - tinned meat, powdered milk, egg powder, cheese, salad and cooking oil, margarine, dried food-stuffs, vitamin tablets, sugar, crockery, cutlery, spare parts for motors and 635 bales of used clothes. - This is the year's report of a Baptist pastor in Sofia who is the distributor of supplies from Geneva - 20 men's, 103 ladies' and 11 children's pairs of shoes; 85 ladies, and 23 children's dresses, 20 men's shirts, 160 pieces of underwear.

Orphanages re-opened, churches restored, pastors provided with clothes and equipment, youth movements re-started, and fresh hopes injected into war shattered congregations! The tale of Reconstruction and Relief is an endless odyssey of grace. And what of the future? "Methods of working", reports the department "Policies, and organisation may alter, funds may diminish and interest wane, but the problems caused by the war and its aftermath will continue for a generation; and what happens in that generation will be fraught with grave consequences for the future of Christendom". The period of great need (especially in Refugee service reported on elsewhere in this issue) continues. A generous and sacrificial support of reconstruction efforts will be required for several years.

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Money Talks

The Church of South India, established a year ago, has made its first contribution to the renewal of Church life in Europe by collecting 1,767 rupees (£st 132). Money came from the poorest villagers.

The Lutheran World Federation has allocated its second million dollars in twelve months for reconstruction work in Germany.

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Refugees

No part of the Assembly's life has more tragic human facts to face than the committee concerned with reconstruction and refugees. At a conservative estimate there are twelve million uprooted and homeless people in Europe today, and a larger proportion of them were thrust into that position through the Potsdam Agreements of the victorious powers. The United Nations International Refugee Organization has been slow in action, and all that the World Council's Refugee Commission can do is supplementary to it. Only a comparatively small budget of some 400,000 U.S.A. dollars may be available for the work and not that amount with any certainty. In a message from Count Bernadotte, the Swedish mediator between Arabs and Jews, there is an appeal for help in connection with 500,000 Arabs now leaving Palestine.

Refugees and their re-settlement are a major Christian concern. Here are the figures for admission to World Council countries since July 1947 - Great Britain 48,685, Belgium 17,678, France 16,628, Canada 13,887, U.S.A. 13,594, Argentina 6,699, Palestine 5,824, Australia, 3,636, Netherlands 3,166, Brazil 2,784. Christian opinion in these lands and others is needed, of the Christian responsibility to this great body of human beings is to be met.

Assembly Visitors Meet

Running parallel with the Assembly is the Visitors' Conference. Planned to give the large number of outstanding non-delegates an insight into Church life in various parts of the world, the best speakers and leaders of the Assembly have been placed in the programme. Speakers on the first day (August 25) included Dean Haalfdaan Hogsbro, of the Practical Theological Seminary of the Danish Church, Copenhagen, Denmark; Prof. Josef L. Hromadka, of the Jan Hus Theological Faculty of the University of Prague, Czechoslovakia; Bishop Dibelius of Berlin, Germany; Dr. Rajah Manikam, Executive Secretary of the National Christian Council of India and Rev. George K.T. Wu, General Secretary of the National Christian Council of China.

Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert, General Secretary of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, and Dr. Gordon A. Sisco, General Secretary of the United Church of Canada, outlined the condition and task of the churches in America. The fact that Christianity is generally treated in America as if it were irrelevant to the major interests of life, such as education and social welfare, and to business, industry and politics, Dr. Cavert said, forbids any complacency on the part of the churches. Of the 256 separate church bodies in the U.S. he estimated that 97% belong to 50 denominations, with a membership of 50,000 or over. Dr. Sisco pointed out that in Canada approximately 58% of the population is Protestant and 42 % Roman Catholic. Protestants in Canada are a strong, cohesive body. Rapid progress is being made by the Evangelical churches in Latin America, but there is yet much to be done, visitors were told at a session on Latin America. Rev. G. Baez-Camargo, Secretary of the National Council of Mexico, said that in spite of the fact that Latin-American nations are among the most divided in and among themselves, there are still many people in these countries who regard a religious minority as something of a crime against national unity, patriotism and loyalty". Increasing numbers of people in these countries, he said, are looking to Evangelical Christianity to satisfy their spiritual longings. Dr. Samuel Rizzo, minister of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, said that in his country, according to the 1940 census, there were 1,074,000 Protestants, Protestantism, he added, is deeply rooted there, and he pointed to the fact that President Vargas had named his sons "Luther" and "Calvin". Brazil has complete religious freedom, and churches are springing up throughout the country. "I believe", Dr. Rizzo declared, "that because of its phenomenal religious growth, the task of the Brazilian Protestant Church is to lead - as far as one country can do - the other peoples of Latin America into the fold of Evangelical Christianity".

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Communion

Sunday August 28, 1948, will be memorable for many delegates to the Assembly for the great Communion service in the Nieuwe Kerk. This "central moment of Christian worship" said Professor Dodd at a plenary session, is not the timeless "now" of the mystic. It is the historical moment of our redemption. At each celebration we are there in Gethsemane, at Golgotha, before the empty Tomb on Easter morning. We are living witnesses of the coming of Christ which is both His coming in history to die for our sins, and His coming in glory with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. We stand within the moment of fulfilment". Communion brings to a head the rehearsal of the drama of our redemption.

https://archive.org/details/eni-bulletin_1948-09-07_15_37-

Sarah Chakko on India

Speaking on the needs and problems of India, Miss Sarah Chakko pointed out that "we have in India today a combination of nationalism and a revival of the cultural elements of the old faiths". India is asking two very important questions: "(1) Apart from a lot of theory, in what way has the Christian message re-created society? (2) What can the Holy Spirit do for the individual?" Miss Chakko said that India needed a united church which would bear a common witness to the redemptive power of the Gospel for society and for the individual, and help to this church both in spiritual resources, personnel and material resources, cutting across denominational and national barriers. Miss Chakko's conclusions were: (1) "It would be disastrous to curtail Christian work in India for financial or other reasons. (2) Indians themselves should bear the responsibility for the witness to their own people. (3) We need more lay men and lay women to weave the word of God into the fabric of daily living".

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Over 200 press representatives (according to Dr. Frederick Reissig, chief of public relations) are covering the Assembly. At a reception which overflowed the main ballroom of the Hotel Europe, they were welcomed by Charles P. Taft, chairman of the publicity committee, and by officials of the Assembly. Dr. Marc Boegner told them that people all over the world eagerly awaited the results of the Assembly. "It will be a failure", he said, "if only a new organization is formed. It must also create the means whereby God's message may be brought to the world in a new way."

* * *

Building the Message

Why doesn't the Church speak out? Why isn't there a united word from the churches? What is the churches' view about this? If only the Church would do something?

All these questions and many more like them heard continually from those inside and outside the Church have echoed in the minds of "Assembly News" representatives as they have watched the grinding, toiling business in the sections and committees of the Amsterdam Assembly, of framing agreed drafts of reports which might lead to a message to the world.

Here is the process of finding a common mind. This is the discipline of discovering a united word. All the many thousands who imagine the way easy and magical should have "sat in" at Amsterdam and experienced the strains of debate and decision. Every delegate present knows the difficulty of finding a common Christian mind even in local and national settings. How more involved and contentious is the same process at the international level.

This message cannot be called "the mind of Christ" nor "the mind of the Church", nor is it the pontifical, verbally inspired utterance of the new World Council. True, it is the World Council speaking at its first Assembly. But in the end it is the word of the delegates, honest, humble men and women - for the most part not better endowed with insight and devout wisdom than their fellows - committed at this critical time to speak a Christian word to the world. The Amsterdam Assembly's finest message will be delegates themselves and through them renewed and rededicated churches.

Religious Liberty

Religious Liberty is one of the central human rights of civilized men. While the World Assembly did not have a full dress debate on the subject the issue was well to the fore in the International Affairs Section of the World Council and the International Missionary Council. ^{is} This is now the channel through which Christian opinion is focussed. The Commission is in active touch with U.N.O. and other international organisations.

Dr.S.A.Morrison, speaking about the difficult conditions for religious liberty in Middle and Near East countries at the Visitors' Conference, said, "hopes had been entertained that with the adoption by Near East governments of Western Constitutions and the introduction of democratic instruments of government, all forms of discrimination on religious grounds would be abolished, and equality of citizenship and of social and economic opportunity established for all, irrespective of their race or religions. Such hopes have in the main been belied by the facts.

"Reaction to the 'imperialistic policy' of the Western Powers since the close of World War I has led to the resuscitation of Islam, as a focus of political and religious unity, and the prevailing tendency to identify nationalism and Arab culture with the Islamic faith has not only prompted measures for the enforcement of cultural homogeneity based on Islam, but has created a conception of citizenship, in which the Christian and the Jew appear to have no legitimate place. The outstanding example of this trend is to be found in Egypt, where economic discrimination against the non-Muslim obtains both in Government service and in private trade, and where Christian children in the government elementary schools are exposed under the system of compulsory education to regular Quer'anic teaching. Little wonder that hundreds of Copts declare themselves Muslims every year, seldom if ever out of conviction, almost always for economic or matrimonial reasons - though many of them seek later to return to their Christian faith. Egypt's political and cultural leadership in the Arab League sets the place for other Near East countries and restrictive trends may be notes at the present time in Syria, Iraq and Transjordan. Even in Turkey, which by the ~~dis~~establishment of Islam has followed the road of ~~sec~~ularism, religious freedom, though constitutionally guaranteed, is still far from being realized in practice. Of the independent Muslim states, Iran probably accords the greatest measure of liberty, though recent reports of conditions there are disturbing. The Lebanon holds a unique and important position in the Near East, as it is the only country with a slight Christian majority."

Dr.Morrison pleaded for the spiritual revival and internal administrative reform of all the ancient churches in the East: closer cooperation with the World Council; recognition of the responsibility of the whole Church for the evangelism of the Muslim population, and the furtherance of religious liberty, both locally through negotiations with governments and the formation of an enlightened public opinion.

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Communion Service

Sunday morning's communion service at the Nieuwe Kerk marked a high point in the Assembly. Following the Dutch Reformed form the service was administered by Dutch Reformed, Methodist, Baptist, Congregationalist,

Indonesian, Swiss and French Reformed leaders. Those who administered the sacraments were Rev.H.J.van Beem, Dutch Reformed; Rev.M.Groenberg, Dutch Reformed; Dr.Marc Boegner, French Reformed; Dr.Alphons Koechlin, Swiss Reformed; Dr. Henry S. Leiper, Congregationalist; Rev. P.W.Evans, Baptist; Rev. Mardjo Sir, Indonesian Reformed; Dr.J.Hutchison Cockburn, Church of Scotland, Rev.E.Benson Perkins, Methodist.

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A. Brotherly Community

"The depersonalization of man in the present-day society is something which has the most immediate bearing on the task of the Church," declared Dr.Emil Brunner, of Zurich, at the Public Meeting on August 30. He placed the blame for this process of depersonalization upon "individualistic liberalism known in the sphere of economics as capitalism, and deterministic collectivism which we usually call totalitarian communism". Prof.Brunner regarded both as destructive of personality as well as of community, and he pointed to a third way: the creation of a "brotherly community", a community in which every individual is valued as a person, and in which mutual personal encounter takes place continually. This he maintained, is the duty of the Church. Brotherly community is the very essence of the Church. In order to create such Church community, it is not enough to preach; and without such community life even the sacraments remain unintelligible... Even the best preaching seems untrustworthy and remains inefficient if it is not accompanied by serious exertions to create real centres and cells of communal life... A church which does show the world what personal community is, is the great miracle in the world which does not cease to make man ask for its 'secret'".

Other speakers on the same evening, dealing with the theme "The Christian Witness in the Social and National Order", were Dr.Reinhold Niebuhr of New York, Mr.Ernest Brown, Privy Councillor in Britain and President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and the Metropolitan Themistocles Chrysostomos of Greece.

"In the day of judgment and catastrophe the Christian Gospel has a message of hope for those who truly repent", Prof.Niebuhr said. He laid great stress upon the need of repentance, within the Church, as the way toward salvation. A new life is possible for those who die to the old self, whether nations or individuals... The new life which we require collectively in our own age is a community wide enough to make the world-wide interdependence of nations in a technical age sufferable; and a justice carefully enough balanced to make the dynamic forces of a technical society yield a tolerable justice rather than an alternation of intolerable anarchy and intolerable tyranny. To accomplish this purpose some of our own preconceptions must go and the same law of love which is no simple possibility for man or society must be enthroned as yet the final standard of every institution, structure and system of justice," Dr.Niebuhr stressed the need of winning "proximate victories" in the world. "The final victory over man's disorder is God's and not ours; but we do have responsibility for the health of our communities, our nations and our cultures degenerate into an intolerable other-worldliness".

"However small the saving remnant which God requires for the reconstruction of our communities it was not forthcoming in Sodom and Gomorrah. One has the uneasy feeling that we are in that position. There is so little health in the whole of our modern civilisation that one cannot find the island of order from which to proceed against disorder. Our choices have become terribly circumscribed. Must we finally choose between atomic annihilation or subjection to universal tyranny. If such a day should come we will remember that the mystery of God's sovereignty and mercy transcends though they perish! However He does not desire their perdition but rather that they turn from their evil ways and live. From us He demands that we work while it is day, since the night cometh when no man can work".

Mr. Brown, speaking from a layman's point of view, continued to develop the need for Christian individual participation on a community level. "Christians," he said, "will best make their witness in the world that passes if their fellows in the multitude see that they do their duty, whether it calls for dirty hands or clean, with competence, faithfulness, cheerfulness and with all their might". He emphasized the fact that young Christians, serving in all phases of secular life, will have to pay a great price in order to maintain their Christian principles and practice in an evil world. Yet, he said, "this is necessary to spread virtue and to spread truth". Mr. Brown concluded on a note of concern for the great mass of people outside the Church. "A new concern for the man outside the Church is now moving within the Church. We must make it effective in the social and national life. We must be concerned for his destiny. He is more than a sheep he is a living soul. 'For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.'"

Metropolitan Chrysostomos called for prophets, like Paul, who through the power of their Christian lives will "have a redeeming influence on society". While the mission of the Church in the world is primarily spiritual, its purpose also is "to unite men with God through Jesus Christ and to sanctify cultural, social and national life so that all may be turned towards God. Religion is not a special sphere of human life, nor a standard of values which exists side by side with other values of civilisation. It concerns the whole of human life and touches the very roots of our nature and our existence".

The social problem he maintained, is also a religious problem. This is why it is now so dynamic. "It is the duty of the Christian Church to remind people forcibly that it is there to deliver man from pain, evil and self-interest. It is only in the Church that Christians will find the weapons required to face social reality. And all who suffer, today, who sigh for justice and truth, will be able to discover in the Christian faith the very principles of the solutions they desire. It is on these principles alone that it will be possible to construct an ideal society, guided by love and brotherhood". Making it plain that the Church should remain above present social and economic systems, being free to judge them all, it should lend its support to all that is inspired by the Christian spirit, and "condemn courageously all social and political methods which stifle man's essential liberties and prevent his free development in accordance with the Christian message."

Unity

In every meeting that "Assembly News" representatives visited during the Assembly the rent condition of the Christian Church was pathetically obvious. Almost every question became a question of unity. "If only we were united!" "If only the Church were one!" - those remarks were heard repeatedly amongst delegates. Speaking about this at the Visitors' Conference Dr. Douglas Horton said that the first priority among the churches should be the will to unite. "That will", he believed, "is bound to grow among us. If we are not drawn into union by Christ, we are likely to be pushed into it by the secular world".

A second priority, Dr. Horton said, was that each branch of the Church should have knowledge of the faith and practice of the others. And a third priority was that each branch of the Church should experiment with union on such a scale as opportunity offered. In Dr. Horton's view "Church union is not a consummation which will burst like a messianic age upon the world sudden and complete: it is both the result of an evolution and a continuing evolution itself. It is like a grain of mustard seed in the earth today, and it will have to go through a most gradual growth before the fowls of our present ecclesiastical air - episcopal, presbyterian, congregational - come to lodge under the shadow of it. The crowning priorities in the movement towards Christian unity are deeds. Only by action - after due consideration - can we prepare the way of the Lord. Athanasius, in his letter to the bishops of Africa, said of the first ecumenical council of 325 A.D., 'What God hath spoken through the Council of Nicaea endureth for ever'. What can be said of this last ecumenical council of Amsterdam in 1948? Will its words endure only if, as we return to our churches, we write them into deeds".

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Dovlo on Africa

At the Visitors' Conference, on August 27th, Mr. C.K. Dovlo, of West Africa, said that "Africa is often described as a sleeping giant. This is true, and the giant has been sleeping all these centuries, but today the giant is awaking from his long sleep. He is not fully awake as yet, and in his half-sleepy state he is throwing his hands about to catch something to support himself. Around him are so many things: Communism with its iron curtain, material civilization with its attractions, blind nationalism with its hatred of all other races, the wounds and bitterness of colour prejudice practised against all coloured races the world over, as well as Christianity.

Which of these things will the giant finally take hold of? The whole futures not only of Africa but also of the world depends on this. It will greatly affect our age for good or for ill, and those of us who see that only in Christianity lies salvation not only for Africa, but for the whole world pray that the giant may take a very firm hold of Christianity. As a true African I want to assure you we are no longer content to remain as hewers of wood and drawers of water for the other races. We want to cast away everything that has hindered us in the past. We are now a determined virile race desiring to contribute our full and unique share to the good of humanity. So we want you to treat us as such because if conditions continue in the world as they are at present we shall pay for it. Christianity for Africa today or never! This is our challenge."

Organization

To accomodate 1,400 people in Amsterdam at a time of national festivities was a feat in itself; to organize the great Concertgebouw as a meeting and working headquarters of the Assembly was another feat. But to do all this and everything else in three languages adds admiration to respect for those "back room" people who have kept the wheels turning. The complicated series of meetings (there were really three assemblies to organize - the main Assembly, the Visitors' and Youth assemblies) sections and committees were a bewildering jig-saw puzzle to many - but the puzzle was fitted! "Assembly News" is not able to mention names of those responsible that would require a special edition - but it salutes the Geneva staff of the World Council for a difficult job magnificently accomplished.

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Oratorio Dedicated to World Council

Dedicated to the World Council of Churches, instrument of Christian unity, the ecumenical oratorio "The Song of Unity" was sung, Sunday, August 29th, in the Oude Kerk (Old Church) on the Oudekerksplein.

The score was written by Bishop Lagerway of Utrecht head of the Old Catholic Church in Holland and the music is the work of the noted Dutch choir director, Alexander de Jong of Utrecht, who directed the choir Sunday. The choir has been practising for a year under Mr. de Jong's direction. The choir is composed chiefly of the choir of the Old Catholic church, but includes members of other Utrecht choirs.

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Reception at the Royal Palace, Amsterdam

Queen Wilhelmina granted permission to the municipality to use the "Burgersaal" for receiving 1500 delegates and visitors who took part in the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches.

The Royal Palace, when built, was not a palace, but a town hall. However, during Napoleon's reign the Town Council was forced to hand over this building to the King of Holland, Louis Napoleon - and it has remained the Royal Palace ever since. In 1936 the government officially bought the building for the Palace. The reception on August 26th, is to be held in the room where the mayor and other city officials received guests in the time that it was a town hall.

After hearing the speech of welcome by the Lord Mayor, Mr. Arnoud J. d'Ailly, the guests looked at the Palace. The interior of the building has outstanding sculpture by Quellinus, the famous Dutch sculptor.

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The official hymnbook for all conference worship was the "Cantate Domino" the book of the World Student Christian Federation, which contains a selection of outstanding hymns in three languages - German, French and English. In addition, the original language of a particular hymn is included if it comes from Finland, China, Hungary, etc. In singing the hymns at the Assembly, the delegates sang in the language they best understood.

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